

# LETHAL TALK

Monthly Newsletter for the 1-121st FA Bn (SECFOR)

June 2007



## COMMAND CORNER

**MAJ. BRIAN WOLHAUPTER, BN CDR**

To the Families and Friends of the 1-121<sup>st</sup> FA (SECFOR),

Hello again, or more accurately, hello for the first time from our new home at Camp Virginia. After the long uncertainty, the hours of planning and work, and the frenzy of moving operations we are finally settled (at least a little) in our new home. I want to you to know that I couldn't be more proud of the soldiers that are your sons, spouses and friends. This has been a monumental undertaking that was thrust upon them and they worked through every part of it with a determined and positive approach. I don't think any other group of men in the Army would have returned the kind of results that they have. I truly wish you could have been here to see all they did and accomplished. With the move over it's on to business as usual, but in a totally new way.

As time passes now, late in our tour, I know you and your soldier are excited and anxious to reach the end of this journey. My family and I share the same feelings. There is still much to be done, though.

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## CSM COMMENT

**CSM JEFFREY FLETCHER**

I'm certain that I'm not telling you anything that you don't already know, but our move to Camp Virginia is complete. I'm very proud of everybody in our battalion! All of you that played a role in planning and executing the move did a fantastic job and I don't think that many other organizations within the Army could have done this as well as you have.

Now that we're here, we need to prepare to train the 7<sup>th</sup> Chemical Company and the 1-160<sup>th</sup> Infantry on the latest techniques, tactics, and procedures so that they'll be as safe as possible during their deployment. The time that we spend with our replacements now will be the most important training that they've received to date. Nobody in Iraq has as much experience as you do escorting convoys. You're the subject matter experts. Teach them what you know so that they can return home too. Don't take any shortcuts during the training process. Some of the things that I'd like you to pay particular attention to when you're training your replacements are:

- Conduct good PMCS on your vehicle
- During your PCCs / PCIs, don't skip

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# Biggest challenge awaits

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We had an opportunity to talk about all that we have done and what lies ahead the other night at a Battalion Formation. The most important challenge and responsibility your soldier will face this whole year still lies ahead; the duty to train well and completely those that will arrive soon to replace us. We are a confident and competent lot in the 1-121 FA. We intend on helping our replacements be the same before we leave. Where you are able, help your soldier to remember this so that they return to you safely, and they do all they can to aid the soldier replacing them to do the same.

The ways and methods of Army travel are understandable to very few and subject to great change in short periods of time. It is far too early to know much on the specific times of our return.

We will return to Camp Shelby to conduct our Demobilization and then at the completion we return to Wisconsin (our soldiers from Maine will return to Ft. Dix and those from Nevada return to Ft. Lewis). I expect the Demob process to last several days, but I will not try to guess a number to assign to the process. Once we are complete we head home. The Rear Detachment(s) will be organizing a "Heroes' Welcome" for the return of the battalion. When they know the details they will get it out to everyone. Please be patient with them.

Until we step off the plane in Wisconsin and all the other destinations that will bring us back to you, know that we are still focused intently on the mission here. Anything less is dangerous. Our thoughts in the quiet times, though, are definitely of you and that time soon when we will be home again.

Very Respectfully,

Brian Wolhaupter  
1-121<sup>st</sup> FA (SECFOR)

**LETHAL TALK** is a monthly newsletter for the soldiers and families of the 121st Field Artillery Battalion.  
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## Let's police ourselves and areas

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any items on your checklists

- Enforce the uniform standards, especially while you're on missions
- While on mission, make sure that everybody is wearing ballistic eye protection, Nomex gloves, and if available, Nomex suits
- Keep the gunners from any unnecessary standing in the turrets

Here at Camp Virginia, we don't have any people hired to clean up after us. There's been a lot of empty bottles and other trash blowing around between the tents and in the PCC/PCI lot. While I'm out walking around the battalion area, I try to police up what trash that I can and dispose of it properly. I'd like your help in keeping our area looking squared away. If you have some trash, take the time to walk to the dumpster and dispose of it properly. When we have visitors to the battalion area, if the area is full of trash and litter, their first impression is that we're not squared away. I know that none of you want people thinking that we're ate up, so please take the time to keep our area clean.

I'll be attending the Sergeant Major Academy at Fort Bliss, TX from 1-15 June and expect to return to Camp Virginia by 18 June. 1SG Kaluzny will be filling in as the battalion Command Sergeant Major while I attend the course. I'm looking forward to getting back here to you so that we can knock out the last month of our deployment and get back home!

CSM Fletcher





# CLOSE CALL

Spec. Nicholas Nething's last route security patrol very easily could have been his last mission ever.

Fortunately, in the ongoing contest between roadside bombs and up-armored vehicles, the armor won this round.

According to 35-year-old Staff Sgt. Duwayne Hartwig of Chicago, a vital part of the route security mission was to search for improvised explosive devices, or IEDs, along the convoy route in southern Iraq. On May 12, he was commanding one of two Bravo Company gun



trucks looking for IEDs, and the patrol was doubling back for a second sweep.

No one in Hartwig's Humvee saw any indication of the bomb, believed to be an artillery round buried in the sandy median.

"I had just checked that area and there were no tell-tale signs," Hartwig said.

"It kind of sucked," Nething added. "It's our job to find these things to provide security for convoys. This one hit us."

The explosion rocked the Humvee and filled the vehicle with dust and smoke. Although three tires were

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## REVIVING THE

# RED BALL EXPRESS

Did anyone ever hear of the “Red Ball Express?” It’s an old railroad term referring to “ship it express,” or “priority freight.”

For those of you who haven’t, imagine being in Europe in August 1944. The allied armies, particularly General George S. Patton’s Third Army, broke out of the Normandy beachhead and were racing across Europe, sometimes attacking faster than the Germans could retreat. The only problem was the Allies were outrunning their supply lines.

So, a fighting Army that could react to tactical and strategic situations without studying a response to death, grabbed trucks and Soldiers from everywhere and formed them into provisional units. Sometimes a few hours of instruction was enough to qualify a driver and put him behind the wheel – after all, this was before the days of civilian companies that offered contract drivers for hire. These convoys could be as small as five trucks with a lead and rear jeep, all traveling at a speed of 35 MPH. These make-shift units ran convoys 24/7 from the coast of Normandy up to the front lines, then turned around to head back for more.

Granted, the operation did not go smoothly at all times. After numerous traffic jams with civilian traffic the military established an outbound route and an inbound route; no civilian traffic was allowed. After several one-vehicle crashes due to exhaustion, relief drivers were added so the Soldiers could take turns sleeping. Though they were behind the front lines, there was still the occasional danger of strafing from German aircraft. The biggest danger was encountering survivors of German units overrun and trapped behind American lines. Most surrendered, but there were a few who preferred to fight it out with any Americans they encountered as they sat in their pockets of resistance or as they tried to find their way

back to their own front lines.

By the time it was over in mid-November 1944, the Red Ball Express delivered over 400,000 tons of all types of supplies to the armies.

And today? Does the spirit of the Red Ball Express live on within the 1-121 FA BN (SECFOR)?

Well, there are no armies advancing anywhere. Up north it’s a grueling counterinsurgency operation, sometimes with real “knock-down drag-out fights” between the insurgents and the Americans. There are the IEDs and especially the EFPs on the MSR and ASRs. Plus, throw in small arms fire and RPGs.

Almost everything about the convoys is planned down to the last detail and controlled by a higher headquarters, though sometimes the OIC/NCOIC on the spot can make tactical decisions on their own. There’s no Patton or Eisenhower, known and admired by the public and military alike, to pay tribute to the efforts of the Soldiers to keep the army up north supplied.

So, I’d say yes, the spirit of the Red Ball Express does live on. After all, without 1-121 FA BN (SECFOR), there’s a lot of convoys, a lot of supplies, that wouldn’t get through to the camps and outposts up north. Right now the mission means being tired, dirty, smelly (and everyone praying nothing happens when someone is getting ready to use their piss bottle), and sometimes facing the danger that comes with the Profession of Arms.

But someday, 20 or 30 years from now, when your grandchild asks you what you did in Iraq, you’ll sort of smile and say, “I served with 1-121 FA, and we made sure the supplies got through to the guys who needed it.”

SSG Hampton





# Bravo soldier survives brush with death

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destroyed in the blast, the bomb did not penetrate the vehicle's armor.

"I couldn't see [Sgt. John] Guyer or Nothing, so I started yelling for them," Hartwig said. "They couldn't hear at first."

Hartwig pulled Nothing down from the gunner's hatch to inspect him for injuries.

"I saw his lips moving, but I couldn't hear what he was saying," Nothing recalled.

Hartwig also checked Guyer for injuries. Finding none, he reported the incident. He credited his prior deployment with the 32<sup>nd</sup> Military Police Company of the Wisconsin Army National Guard with helping him handle the attack.

"I knew exactly what was going on," he explained. "I was able to stay calm and take a couple of deep breaths."

Using the spare tires from both patrol vehicles and a tire provided from a nearby Army outpost, the two crews performed a self-recovery on the damaged Humvee. The blast also rendered the air conditioning inoperable and damaged the suspension.

But the extent of their good fortune was not fully known until the soldiers realized that shrapnel from the bomb had struck Nothing's helmet.

"Thank God for ACH's [Army Combat Helmets]," said Sgt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class John Lemke, Nothing's platoon sergeant.

Nothing, 20, of Manitowoc, also credited a new gunner's turret with saving his life. Had he been in the older turret, he might have been peering over the side to look for IEDs, which would have exposed his face to the blast.

"That would have been bad," he acknowledged.

Nothing and Guyer were taken off missions for 48 hours; Hartwig returned to the road the next day.

"It's just one of those things," Hartwig said. "It's something you have to deal with. It's no big deal."

It helped that the Humvees have much better armor now than on his first deployment, when roadside bombs would demolish the rugged vehicles. It also helped that Hartwig enjoyed his mission.



"We helped other people a lot," he said. "There were more IEDs in southern Iraq than I thought there would be."

Lemke estimated that his route security platoon found and cleared 13 IEDs, more than half placed in their area of responsibility. The group also thwarted 21 hijacking attempts.

That platoon has been assigned to convoy escort duties now, and Nothing returned to duty as soon as he was allowed, to be able to take part in the platoon's first run in their new mission.

"Spec. Nothing showed a can-do spirit," Lemke observed.

Nothing shrugged off the praise.

"We were just doing our jobs," he said.

While conceding that the route security mission was becoming more dangerous, Lemke maintained it was a good mission to have.

"You got intimate with the locals," he explained. "We spoke with the mayor [of Safwan, a city just north of the Iraq border along the supply route], with judges, with police. We gave away 60-70 boxes of donated items to local children."

"What we are doing now is a nice change," Lemke continued, "but you can tell that we were really making a difference on our last mission."

Which makes IED attacks all the more frustrating, he said.

"You get angry, because we were helping them," he said. "The insurgents have no vested interest there."

Guyer declined to be interviewed for this report.

# DID YOU KNOW?

- ... that **47** countries have re-established their embassies in Iraq ?
- ... that the Iraqi government currently employs **1.2 million** Iraqi people?
- ... that **3,100 schools** have been renovated, **364 schools** are under rehabilitation, **263 new schools** are now under construction and 38 new schools have been completed in Iraq ?
- ... that Iraq's higher educational structure consists of **20 Universities, 46 Institutes or colleges** and **4 research centers**, all currently operating?
- ... that **25 Iraq students** departed for the United States in January 2005 for the re-established Fulbright program?
- ... that the Iraqi Navy is operational? They have five 100-foot patrol craft, 34 smaller vessels and a naval infantry regiment.
- ... that Iraq's Air Force consists of three operational squadrons, which includes 9 reconnaissance and 3 US C-130 transport aircraft (under Iraqi operational control) which operate day and night, and will soon add 16 UH-1 helicopters and 4 Bell Jet Rangers?
- ... that Iraq has a counter-terrorist unit and a Commando Battalion?
- ... that the Iraqi Police Service has **over 55,000** fully trained and equipped police officers?
- ... that there are 5 Police Academies in Iraq that produce over **3,500 new officers** every 8 weeks?
- ... there are more than **1,100 building projects** going on in Iraq? They include 364 schools, 67 public clinics, 15 hospitals, 83 railroad stations, 22 oil facilities, 93 water facilities and 69 electrical facilities.
- ... that **96 percent** of Iraqi children under the age of 5 have received the first 2 series of polio vaccinations?
- ... that **4.3 million Iraqi children** were enrolled in primary school by mid October?
- ... that there are **1,192,000** cell phone subscribers in Iraq and phone use has gone up 158 percent?
- ... that Iraq has an independent media that consists of 75 radio stations, 180 newspapers and 10 television stations?
- ... that the Baghdad Stock Exchange opened in June of 2004?
- ... that 2 candidates in the Iraqi presidential election had a televised debate recently?

## OF COURSE WE DIDN'T KNOW! WHY? **OUR MEDIA WOULDN'T TELL US!**

Instead of reflecting our love for our country, we get photos of flag burning incidents at Abu Ghraib and people throwing snowballs at the presidential motorcades.

Tragically, the lack of accentuating the positive in Iraq serves two purposes: It is intended to undermine the world's perception of the United States, thus minimizing consequent support, and it is intended to discourage American citizens.

The above facts are verifiable on the Department of Defense web site.

... *Pass it on!*

<http://www.defense.gov/>

<http://www.pentagon.mil/>

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<http://www.defendamerica.mil/iraq.html>

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